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Chairman: Mr. Aliyev ..... (Azerbaijan)

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The meeting was called to order at 2.40 p.m.

Agenda item 28: Effects of atomic radiation
(*continued*)

1. **Mr. Mohideen** (India) said that the work of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation had immense implications for the health of thousands of occupational workers, people undergoing radiation-based medical procedures, people living in areas of the world with high natural background radiation and the general public, and for the protection of the environment. The scientific annexes to its reports that it would produce in 2006 and 2007 would reflect its latest assessments and should prove very interesting.

2. Cancer remained the main concern among radiation-induced health effects, although many factors entered into the disease. There were very few hard data on the health effects of low-dose radiation. New scientific insights into cell death, DNA damage and repair, and immune system reactions were enriching the debate in the scientific community on the risk of low-dose exposures, which recent research had indicated might not always be deleterious. The current conflict of opinion on the health effects of natural and medical low-dose radiation exposure needed to be resolved by the collection of more direct data, both ecological and epidemiological. International agencies should support epidemiological studies on populations living in areas with high background radiation such as India, China, Iran and Brazil, covering not just cancer but also genetic anomalies, and the results should be critically analysed.

3. India welcomed the Scientific Committee's participation, along with international and United Nations agencies, in the recent Chernobyl Forum. Its efforts should help to provide a fuller picture of the health effects of that accident.

4. The United Nations should provide the Scientific Committee with a strong budget that would allow it to conduct its work effectively and employ qualified consultants.

Adoption of draft resolution on the effects of atomic radiation (A/C.4/60/L.8)

5. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to take action on the draft resolution which was not expected to give rise to any programme budget implications. He announced that Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Turkey had joined the sponsors.

6. **Mr. Frydenlund** (Norway) said that Norway also wished to sponsor the draft resolution.

7. *Draft resolution A/C.4/60/L.8 was adopted.*

Agenda item 30: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
(A/60/13 and A/60/439)

8. **Ms. AbuZayd** (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)), introducing the annual report of UNRWA covering the period from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005 (A/60/13), said that the Agency had for over five decades provided educational, health and social services to the Palestine refugees in five fields of operation: Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Sixty per cent of its budget went to education, which was of central importance to the refugees themselves, and was of high quality. The Agency's health-care services had also been praised recently by the World Health Organization (WHO) for their comprehensive range. The Agency's social safety net, which provided the bare essentials of life — shelter, food and water — had been another important feature from the start. Currently, food and cash were being offered to over 60,000 families living in particular hardship, and community-based efforts to promote the empowerment of women and other vulnerable groups were also being supported. The Agency's microfinance and microcredit programme, which had been in operation for almost 15 years, was a relative newcomer to the Agency. It was now the largest provider of microcredit in the occupied Palestinian territory, and the programme had been expanded into the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan. Some $18 million in loans — a 34 per cent increase over 2004 — had been offered in the course of the year, and repayment rates were high, despite the economic decline.

9. The Agency faced many hurdles, not least among them the austerity measures introduced in the mid-1990s. The resulting funding shortfalls had fundamentally affected the quality of UNRWA services and the ability to attract and retain qualified staff. The Agency had been unable to invest in maintenance and new buildings, especially schools; double shifts and

crowded classrooms were now the norm. Without more funds, the Agency would be unable to maintain the quality of even basic health care. In order to reach all refugees in need, it was having to shift its relief and food aid from a status-based to a needs-based approach.

10. The additional emergency programme for the distribution of food and necessities that UNRWA had been operating since the crisis in late 2000 in the occupied Palestinian territory had generated sought-after short-term jobs for refugees whose incomes had collapsed as a result of closures and continuing violence. Refugees whose homes had been destroyed — some 16,000 of them currently — were provided with temporary accommodation until new housing could be built.

11. The operational environments were different in each of the five areas in which the Agency worked, and were constantly changing. The plight of Palestine refugees had historically been most difficult in Lebanon, primarily because of limitations on employment. The Government, however, had recently announced plans to open up job access to the refugees and to improve living conditions in the camps in the country, that was a most welcome change that warranted strong encouragement. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Government had been extremely helpful in promoting innovative housing improvements, and in Jordan, refugees enjoyed wide access to services and also to citizenship.

12. In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the wider political circumstances drastically affected the lives of refugees and UNRWA operations could not function without both Israel's facilitation and the Palestinian Authority's support and cooperation. During the Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip in the first part of the reporting period, the violence had killed 23 UNRWA pupils; Israel had failed in its obligation to protect Palestinian children while protecting its own citizens. Internally, there had been a smooth transition of power within the Palestinian Authority, and the Agency enjoyed excellent working relations with it at all levels. It was the Authority's view that UNRWA must continue to serve the Palestine refugees even after Israel's disengagement, until the refugee issue was settled in final-status negotiations.

13. The latter part of the reporting period had seen a welcome respite from military incursions and house demolitions and the population of the occupied Palestinian territory had been further encouraged by Israel's disengagement. The Agency had been working closely with the Special Envoy for Disengagement of the Quartet team on how best to channel aid for positive change and economic improvement. In the immediate term, the Agency had focused on microcredit, job creation and the reconstruction of demolished houses, and it was poised to expand activities whenever additional funds were made available. It supported the Special Envoy's message and the World Bank's warning about the need for economic openings and freer movement of people and goods from Gaza into the West Bank. Currently, 1.3 million Palestinians found themselves trapped in a small area with no link to the West Bank, to Israel or to the outside world. Israel's construction of the separation barrier bore heavily on the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank, ghettoizing the Palestinian communities there and depriving them of access to parts of their own lands and to places of work, education and health care. The barrier also made the Agency's daily operations difficult. The apparent resumption of another cycle of violence and counter-violence was disquieting. The Agency's emergency programme remained a vital safety net to refugees in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and it might be required for some time to come.

14. The Agency's medium-term plan, which had been presented a year earlier, was being regularly updated in consultation with stakeholders. Recently, UNRWA had proposed the expansion of its Advisory Commission, and it had embarked on a comprehensive data collection process to improve its own ability to ascertain and monitor needs, while awaiting the results of a study to help it to improve gender mainstreaming. The Agency was also engaged in intense internal discussions on organizational reform and on a timetable for the introduction of changes. The discussions would continue at a forthcoming meeting of hosts and donors later in the month.

15. The Agency's achievements in recent years were, she believed, quite remarkable, especially considering the conditions under which it had been operating, its skeleton managerial staff, limited resources, and the need, for security reasons, to relocate almost all international headquarters staff outside the Gaza Strip. At the same time, the Agency's tasks were growing to meet increasingly complex needs.

16. As the embodiment of the international community's commitment to the Palestine refugees, UNRWA deserved its support. The needs-based budget prepared for the 2006-2007 biennium was some 30 per cent higher than that for the previous biennium. It detailed what was required both to halt a decline in service quality and to meet the objectives of the medium-term plan. If the international community and UNRWA worked together, the Agency would be able to meet the challenges before it.

17. **Mr. Adel** (Egypt) asked the Commissioner-General whether the Advisory Commission would receive more funding because of its proposed expansion.

18. **Ms. AbuZayd** (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said that there would be no new financing for the additional members, but that more funds would be needed for a Commission secretariat. The point of the expansion was to engage the Commission more formally in the work of the Agency and to make it a more structured body.

19. **Mr. Frydenlund** (Norway), introducing the report of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (A/60/439), said that, even though the Agency's financial balance had improved, that trend might not be maintained. Moreover, there was still a gap between assessed needs and available funds. The Commissioner-General's fund-raising efforts should continue and a broader base of donors should be sought. Governments should increase their contributions, honour their pledges or start contributing to the Agency's biennium budget and medium-term plan. The budget for the biennium 2006-2007 was based on needs and was designed to reverse the effects of successive years of underfunding, raise the standard of services and build the Agency's capacity. He called for the early fulfilment of pledges and commitments to UNRWA, in particular the reimbursement of value added tax and port charges by the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government. The Israeli Government should enhance its cooperation with the Agency to maximize the benefits of donor contributions by ensuring the speedy delivery of UNRWA services.

20. Although the Palestinian refugee issue was a political one, the refugees' current problems were humanitarian, and the international community had a shared responsibility to address them. In view of the absence of any prospect of a turnaround in the rates of poverty and unemployment in the near future, certain elements of the Agency's emergency interventions should continue in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Working Group commended the Commissioner-General and the staff of UNRWA for the efforts to maintain the Agency's basic operations, despite resource constraints and access problems on the ground, and to provide the minimum services necessary to enable the refugees to lead productive lives. Any further reduction in those services would not only unfairly deprive the refugees of the level of support to which they were entitled, but could also have a destabilizing effect on the entire region. The Agency played a role vital to stability and security in the region.

21. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for Palestine) said that the plight of the Palestinian refugees, whose number exceeded four million, would continue to be of paramount importance to the international community until their natural right to return to their homes and properties was recognized. Their situation remained as critical as it had been 57 years earlier and it had been exacerbated by decades spent by many in abject poverty, in refugee camps and in the diaspora while they awaited the realization of their right to return under General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The situation of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced in 1967 also continued to be difficult. Their right to return had been affirmed in Security Council resolution 237 (1967) and should have been realized years earlier. Those rights remained unfulfilled because of Israel's failure to comply. The relevant fundamental principles of international law must be respected. Palestinian refugees had an inalienable right to return, like all other refugees in the world, past and present. The individual right to private ownership, including ownership of land, was also important. According to the United Nations Conciliation Commission of Palestine, Palestinian refugees owned 5.5 million dunums of land. That ownership should be recognized by Israel and restored, or, if the owners accepted, should serve as a basis for compensation as part of any settlement of the refugee problem.

22. Israel's intransigence had for decades obstructed the resolution of the crisis. It had failed to acknowledge responsibility for the plight of the refugees and remained locked in positions contrary to

international law. The situation of the refugees in the occupied Palestinian territory was dismal, characterized by high unemployment, extreme poverty, overcrowded shelters and inadequate infrastructure. Their suffering was compounded by excessive and indiscriminate violence and systematic violations of human rights committed by the occupying forces. Israel's repeated sieges and assaults against civilian areas, including the camps, caused extreme anguish among the refugees and resulted in their forced displacement and further dispossession. The Israeli occupying forces targeted and terrorized the camps, particularly in Rafah and Jabaliya. In addition to unwarranted deaths and destruction, those brutal acts exacerbated the dire socio-economic condition of the refugee population. They were contrary to the basic rules and principles of international law, particularly article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Moreover, they had made the work of UNRWA more difficult, increasing the need for essential services, undermining the Agency's ability to deliver aid and exposing its staff and facilities to serious risks. The continued restrictions imposed by Israel on the freedom of movement of Palestinian persons and goods placed a great strain on the refugees, severely hampering their access to work, schools, health care, food and clean water. Israel's unlawful construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, had caused additional hardship, further isolating and impoverishing hundreds of refugee families. As a result, emergency aid had been necessary, particularly for the special hardship cases which comprised 5.8 per cent of the registered refugee population.

23. The dismantling of illegal Israeli settlements and the withdrawal of Israeli occupying forces from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank had been an important step towards reversing Israel's colonization of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. However, the Israeli disengagement, which had been unilaterally planned and implemented, had failed to recognize Palestinian concerns and had left many critical issues unresolved. According to an assessment by the Commissioner-General earlier in the year, if borders opened, if overseas links could be created and if enterprise was allowed to flourish, the disengagement could make a real difference to Palestinian lives; if not, the humanitarian situation would remain depressingly bleak. Accordingly, the Palestinian leadership hoped that the disengagement would provide constructive momentum that would help to improve the socio-economic condition of the refugees in Gaza. To that end, Israel should resolve all the remaining issues, inter alia, by lifting the severe restrictions on the freedom of movement of Palestinian persons and goods, removing the strangulating military sieges and closures, and ceasing its construction of the wall. Israel should heed the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice on 9 July 2004. Israel's disengagement had not changed Gaza's legal status as an occupied territory nor had it modified the Agency's mandate to provide aid and assistance to the refugee population.

24. The international community's continued financial support of UNRWA was as vital as its continued political support. The refugees often feared that the Agency's financial difficulties indicated that the international community's commitment to the refugee issue was waning. The Agency was pursuing innovative ways of raising funds, focusing, inter alia, on Arab donors, particularly those located in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, and on the establishment of independent country support groups. Increased financial assistance to UNRWA would contribute to its sustainability and effectiveness. The expansion of the Advisory Commission would contribute significantly to the promotion of the Agency's work, and he thanked the delegation of Sweden, which had facilitated consultations in New York on that matter. Finally, he expressed appreciation for the cooperation of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic with UNRWA, and for their efforts to facilitate the Agency's work.

25. **Mr. Al Manei** (United Arab Emirates) said that in the 58 years since the Palestinian question had arisen, the sufferings of the Palestinian population had continuously increased. When work had begun on construction of the separation wall, thousands of additional acres of Palestinian lands, natural resources and water had been destroyed and thousands more Palestinians had been displaced. The humanitarian crisis among the Palestinians had worsened and the rates of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy among the Palestinian refugees had increased. The ongoing construction of the wall inside the West Bank had isolated and impoverished those living in the adjacent areas, especially in the area between the wall and the 1949 truce line. The presence of the wall had also

impeded the efforts of UNRWA, particularly efforts to provide emergency humanitarian services to those affected.

26. The extreme conditions of deprivation and unemployment prevailing in some refugee camps as a result of the imposition of certain local laws were cause for concern. The Agency had insufficient funds, that had had an adverse impact on its infrastructure and its ability to implement its development programmes and plans, as well as on the quality of its service programmes such as the emergency assistance programmes for the Palestinian refugee camps. States and donor financial institutions such as the World Bank should double their contributions to UNRWA and increase their efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian refugees inside and outside the occupied territories.

27. The problem of the Palestinian refugees was an integral part of the question of Palestine and must be solved within the framework of a just, lasting and comprehensive solution of that question and of the situation in the Middle East. The refugees must be repatriated and compensated for their financial and moral losses in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, especially resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III). The responsibility for finding a solution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees continued to devolve on the international community.

28. **Mr. Hassan** (Jordan) said that UNRWA should continue to operate in the region until a final solution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees was agreed upon between all the parties concerned and was fully implemented. For many years, the Agency had proved vital to the Palestinian refugees and the host countries, and all donor countries should continue to contribute to its budget. Jordan hosted approximately 1.8 million Palestinian refugees, or over 42 per cent of the total number and 90 per cent of those displaced in 1967. In 2005, Jordan had spent over $463 million on education, health, infrastructure, social welfare and security services to the refugees, in addition to improving living conditions in 13 refugee camps in Jordan. Despite its own budgetary and financial difficulties, Jordan had funded such activities since the beginning of the Palestinian refugee problem in 1948 and had made up for decreases in UNRWA services caused by the Agency's budgetary deficit. In the biennium 2004-2005, UNRWA had spent $76.1 million on operations in Jordan and the Jordanian Government had spent $463.5 million on refugee services. The Palestinian problem should be resolved on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and the Arab Peace Initiative, with full guarantees for the rights of the refugees and the host countries. Furthermore, any agreed solution should comply with article 8 on the resolution of the problem of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons under international law of the Peace Treaty signed between Israel and Jordan. The Palestinian refugees should not be categorized on the basis of the geographical location where they were being hosted or on the basis of their living conditions. Israel should facilitate the operations of UNRWA by not impeding the work of its staff in the occupied Palestinian territory. His delegation supported the expansion of the Advisory Commission in such a way that it would help to support the work of the Agency.

29. **Mr. Ali Ahmad** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that there was still no glimmer of hope for an approaching end to the long-standing tragedy of the Palestinian people through full restitution of their legitimate rights, including the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their land. For over half a century, the international community had been a bystander to the circle of violence and oppression, thus encouraging Israel's continuation of its brutal policies against Palestinians and exacerbating the situation of Palestinian refugees in the occupied territories, as amply illustrated in the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/60/13). Israel was impervious to the calls for it to comply with international humanitarian law in the knowledge that it was immune to any United Nations resolution adopted. The continued construction of the separation wall against the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice also increased the suffering of those refugees living next to it and created new obstacles to the delivery of essential UNRWA services. In blatant violation of its legal commitments under international law, Israel had further extended its brutal practices to include the injuring and killing of UNRWA students, as detailed in the report, together with incidents in which UNRWA staff and vehicles were subjected to delay, denial of passage or worse at checkpoints in the West Bank. His country was a host to Palestinian refugees, who received various forms of support at great cost to his Government and were treated identically with Syrians. It had therefore been pleased to note the references in the report to its

ongoing cooperation and coordination with UNRWA, to which it had always lent support and assistance.

30. The plight of the Palestinian refugees was an international responsibility. UNRWA should therefore continue to perform its work and also to pursue its efforts to expand its donor base with a view to improving the situation of the refugees and enabling them to realize their inalienable rights. In addition, its services should be enhanced and delivered to its five fields of operation without interruption. The international community should respond to the Agency's emergency appeals for support, since neither the Palestinian refugee community nor the host countries should be financially burdened by the deficit in the Agency's budget. He hoped that UNRWA staff would receive the same hazard pay as other United Nations personnel, bearing in mind that some had lost their lives after being targeted by occupation forces.

31. It was now 57 years since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which had been constantly underscored by subsequent resolutions, in addition to further resolutions that inextricably linked the inalienable rights of the Palestinian refugees with the right to self-determination. Israel had proved without doubt, through its aggressive and provocative behaviour, including the use of brute military force against Palestinians and UNRWA facilities, that it was still not ready for the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace that would guarantee the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes. It was time that the international community exerted pressure on Israel to end its occupation of Arab territories and obliged it to comply with United Nations resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

32. **Ms. Juul** (Norway) commended UNRWA for the vital role it continued to play in preserving the stability of the region under difficult and often dangerous circumstances. The Gaza disengagement had raised expectations of an improvement in the quality of life of the Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank and the donor community was mobilizing resources to respond to the high rates of poverty and unemployment.

33. She urged fellow donors to contribute to the Agency's general budget and to respond to emergency appeals so that it would have the resources to carry out its mandate. Scarce resources must, however, be used efficiently, that required transparency and dialogue between the Agency and the host authorities regarding priorities. She therefore supported the revitalization and expansion of the Advisory Commission and widened participation in host and donor meetings.

34. She expressed concern that the cost of humanitarian assistance had risen sharply owing to port and related charges imposed on imports through Israel. Costs had also increased as a result of closures by the Israeli defence forces and the construction of the wall, which separated Palestinians from schools, places of work and services. She called upon the Israeli Government to facilitate the speedy delivery of all UNRWA services.

35. **Mr. La Rosa Domínguez** (Cuba) welcomed the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/60/13), which described the excellent work done by the Agency in difficult conditions that were often attributable to the hostile attitude of the Israeli Government, as evidenced by the latter's harassment of the Agency's operations, including the detentions of its staff.

36. His delegation opposed the elimination of any of the bodies created to promote the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. It would also be unacceptable to call for the elimination of UNRWA. The cost of such bodies was a small price to pay for the duty of the organization and the international community to assist the long-suffering and heroic Palestinian people in their quest for statehood.

37. The international community should not be deluded into thinking that Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip signalled the beginning of a definitive solution to the Palestine problem. Israel continued to control the land, sea and air borders, and many thorny problems, including that of the refugees, remained unsolved. Furthermore, Israel was continuing the construction of its illegal separation wall, depriving Palestinians of freedom of movement, access to basic services, lands and water; it was a de facto annexation of nearly 60 per cent of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in violation of General Assembly resolution 15 adopted at the tenth emergency special session. A just and lasting peace in the Middle East remained a pipe dream.

38. He commended UNRWA for ending the year 2004 with a budget surplus, but expressed concern that the current year might close with a deficit. He

commended countries and institutions which had supported UNRWA in its work of providing assistance to the Palestine refugees, including the most vulnerable, and supported the Agency's request for increased resources to meet the growing demand for its services. In spite of the economic blockade imposed on Cuba by the Government of the United States, his Government had provided free bursaries to more than 350 young Palestinians, more than 300 of whom had received university degrees.

39. He reiterated his delegation's support for the work of UNRWA in assisting the population and for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. He also called for the unconditional return of all Arab territories occupied by Israel and reaffirmed that all Israeli settlements established in the occupied Arab territories since 1967 were illegal. His delegation hoped for a just and lasting peace for all the peoples of the Middle East.

40. **Mr. Kabtani** (Tunisia) said that, as exemplified in the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/60/13), the Palestinian refugees continued to suffer grim living conditions, including closures, destruction of property and restrictions on their mobility, and were caught in an endless cycle of violence at the hands of the Israeli occupation authorities. The end result was an economic and humanitarian disaster of proportions beyond the Agency's capacities that consequently demanded urgent international intervention. He was concerned about the adverse impact of dwindling resources on the delivery of UNRWA services and appealed to donor States to increase their contributions to the Agency's budget. He hoped that the generosity of such contributions would form the yardstick for enlargement of the membership of its Advisory Commission. He had also hoped that the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip would alleviate the restrictions imposed on Palestinian refugees, particularly concerning the movement of persons and goods, and consequently alleviate the burdens on UNRWA. The news of the currently escalating violence in the occupied Palestinian territories was therefore highly regrettable and distressing.

41. He expressed his appreciation to the countries hosting Palestinian refugees, in particular the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon and Jordan. Tunisia had consistently supported UNRWA, both politically and financially, and he wished to stress that any just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question would have to take into account the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes or be paid compensation in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

42. **Mr. Hamadah** (Kuwait) said that UNRWA should continue to operate until the important question of the Palestinian refugees was resolved in accordance with paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Despite its financial difficulties, he hoped that UNRWA would continue to deliver its services to the refugees. In that connection, he commended its efforts to broaden the base of donors to its budget. In particular, the Agency should perform its tasks without distinction among any of its five operational areas, where its educational, health and social reform programmes were to be applauded. For its part, Kuwait remained fully committed to making its annual voluntary contribution of US$ 1.5 million to the Agency's regular budget.

43. Israel justified its repressive practices against the Palestinian people, which had continued relentlessly since September 2000, on the grounds that it was protecting its national security and ending violent activities. On the contrary, however, its policies had resulted in an escalation of violence and a further decline in the living conditions of the Palestinians. It was extremely disturbing that the Israeli authorities should constantly obstruct the Agency's humanitarian work, in violation of international agreements which it should instead respect. The Israeli army's destruction of shelters for Palestinian refugees and facilities run by UNRWA was no less regrettable than its deliberate and illegal detention of UNRWA staff. Praising the dedication of UNRWA staff in their work in such difficult conditions, he said that they should enjoy the same privileges as United Nations staff working in the region. He expressed full solidarity with the Palestinian people and supported their legitimate efforts to obtain all of their rights under the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, while welcome, should be regarded only as a first step towards full withdrawal from all the territories occupied in 1967. To that end, he called on the Israeli Government to comply with the terms of reference on which the peace process was based and to implement the Road Map and agreements concluded

with the Palestinian Authority in the context of that process.

44. **Mr. Semadeni** (Switzerland) said that the examination results achieved by refugee students, the health standards in the communities, and the programmes' contribution to the local economy testified to the success of the UNRWA education, health, and relief and social services programmes in the Agency's five areas of operation. The host countries provided invaluable support to the refugees, and he welcomed the renewed dialogue and measures taken in Lebanon to improve the dire socio-economic situation of the refugees living in that country. The international community should call on Israel to comply with international humanitarian law and at all times facilitate access to humanitarian services by the Palestinian population, including UNRWA-registered refugees. A joint study by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Food Programme and UNRWA had shown that 1.4 million Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza did not have food security, and that the number of vulnerable households headed by women had significantly increased. He hoped for sustained improvement in the overall security situation and for an upturn in the economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, that would enable the Agency to wind down its emergency operations in favour of its main programmes.

45. In June 2004 a major conference had been held in Geneva on "Meeting the Needs of Palestine Refugees in the Near East: Building Partnership in Support of UNRWA", and the stakeholders were duly implementing its key recommendations. Switzerland attached particular importance to proposals for the expansion of the membership of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA, the collection of a comprehensive set of data in order to develop needs-based service provision, the development of a strategic framework aimed at further enhancing the Agency's programme-management capacity, and the development of synergies within the global humanitarian community.

46. **Mr. Hulan** (Canada) said that UNRWA was carrying out critically important work, and her Government had pledged its continuing support for the Agency's endeavours.

47. Israel's recent withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank had created new opportunities to improve the lives of the Palestinian people and return to the Road Map. Much effort was needed to maximize such opportunities, and her Government had made a commitment to increase its involvement and support to the Palestinian Authority during the forthcoming crucial period.

48. The humanitarian relief and essential services provided by UNRWA to the Palestinians remained vitally important. In September, her Government had announced a contribution of $6 million to support the Agency's job creation and microcredit lending initiatives in Gaza, that was in addition to the $10 million contributed to its core budget. There was currently an opportunity for a new level of partnership between the Agency and the Palestinian Authority in the planning and programming of services, and her Government would help to promote that partnership if requested.

49. Humanitarian assistance could be delivered only if access routes were open, and her Government was working closely with its Palestinian, Israeli and donor partners to ensure that people and goods were able to move in and out of Gaza, including to the West Bank.

50. The reform process initiated within UNRWA should contribute to the welfare of the Palestinian refugees and achieve greater accountability. Reform efforts would play a crucial role in maintaining donor support.

51. **Mr. Adel** (Egypt) said that Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and settlements in the northern West Bank had produced no improvement in the situation of Palestinian refugees, whose hopes of a safe return to their homes had been dashed by Israel's procrastination in withdrawing from the remaining occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in accordance with the Road Map. The difficulty of the situation was further exacerbated by the shortage of funds available to UNRWA, which was nevertheless working tirelessly to relieve the suffering of the Palestinian people. He highlighted the severe and sustained mobility and other restrictions imposed on the Palestinian people, which had repercussions on their daily life and on UNRWA operations, as clearly depicted in the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/60/13). In particular, UNRWA staff were repeatedly obstructed in their work, not least where the

delivery of humanitarian assistance was concerned. During the period covered by the report, the humanitarian, political, economic and social situation of the Palestinian people had deteriorated significantly. In that connection, the impact of Israel's continued construction of the separation wall had been particularly adverse and it was therefore imperative that Israel should comply with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the subject.

52. Despite low funding, UNRWA had nevertheless managed to continue to provide assistance in the fields of education, health and relief and social services, as well as through its microfinance and microenterprise programme. The work involved in tackling the problems of Palestinian refugees should be duly prioritized, however, through increased donor contributions and a better international response to appeals for emergency assistance. In that connection, he welcomed the efforts under way to include donor States as members of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA and hoped that funding would consequently improve. Lastly, he asserted that it would be impossible to deal with the worsening humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories without effectively addressing the issue of the Israeli occupation and attendant practices in the context of international and regional efforts to move beyond the current impasse in the peace process with a view to achieving a just and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question.

53. **Mr. Migliore** (Observer for the Holy See) drew attention to the growing difficulties encountered by Palestinian Christians, a tiny group of people who constituted less than 2 per cent of the local Palestinian population. They were sometimes viewed with suspicion by their neighbours and consequently suffered doubly from discrimination and marginalization. Recently Christians had been exposed to intolerable acts of religious extremism in the area around Bethlehem, and he hoped that local leaders would find ways of addressing the needs of all members of local communities targeted by violence.

54. The security wall was having adverse effects in terms of the access of some Palestinians to their land and water sources, customary amenities and places of worship. While the Holy See acknowledged the right of all peoples to live in security, it considered that the Holy Land was in greater need of bridges than of walls. He hoped that problems would be resolved by negotiation and dialogue.

55. A lasting solution to the problems of the region must cover the question of the Holy City of Jerusalem. In the light of current circumstances, the Holy See renewed its support for internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion and of conscience of its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the Holy Places by the faithful of all religions and nationalities, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 2 adopted at the tenth emergency special session.

Agenda item 116: Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly (continued) (A/C.4/60/WP.1 and A/C.4/60/WP.2)

56. **Mr. Eliasson** (President of the General Assembly) welcomed the opportunity to take stock of the progress achieved by the Committee with regard to the revitalization of its work and, in that context, welcomed the proposals contained in the non-paper approved by the Committee (A/C.4/60/WP.2), in particular the use of question and answer sessions and interactive dialogues. He stressed the need to be innovative in promoting real dialogue and to explore different methods and formats in order to make discussions within the Organization more lively, engaging and relevant to outside realities.

57. He welcomed the Committee's thoughts regarding the allocation of agenda items. He had encouraged all Committee Chairmen to make an analysis of what criteria should apply in the allocation of an agenda item to the plenary Assembly or to a committee; that was an important topic and there should be greater transparency. Some issues should be discussed in both the plenary Assembly and a Committee; one example was the need to promote a culture of prevention throughout the Organization, an important aspect of which was the need to be proactive in preventing conflicts and promoting security and development.

58. The Committee's efforts should be seen in the broader context of the revitalization of the General Assembly, to which he was particularly attached. The previous day he had drafted a letter drawing attention to the decision in General Assembly resolution 59/313, paragraph 4, to establish an ad hoc working group to identify ways to further enhance the role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency of the General Assembly.

That tool should be used to move the revitalization agenda forward on matters such as the allocation of items and the streamlining of resolutions. Thematic debates could likewise be a worthwhile tool to achieve progress on various topics, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals, such as health, in both the plenary Assembly and a committee.

59. The best way to revitalize the General Assembly was to ensure follow-up to the 2005 World Summit Outcome, which, while not perfect, was a good starting point. He looked forward to progress with regard to the Peacebuilding Commission, the Human Rights Council and a comprehensive convention on international terrorism and on issues related to development, a more effective Economic and Social Council, and management reform. The year 2006 must be a year of implementation, when words would be translated into action. Member States could count on his support in such efforts.

60. **Ms. Cousins** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania, the candidate countries Turkey and Croatia, the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and in addition, Liechtenstein, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine said that the European Union strongly supported efforts to strengthen the role and authority of the General Assembly in line with the principles and objectives outlined in the Summit Outcome and General Assembly resolution 59/233. The efforts of the previous two Presidents of the General Assembly were commendable but progress so far had been disappointing. It was important that the General Assembly should continue with its efforts, inter alia through the ad hoc working group. The European Union was committed to participating fully in the Committee's discussions on the revitalization of its work and the improvement of its working methods.

61. **Ms. Anguiano Rodriguez** (Mexico) said that her delegation attached great importance to the work of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, not only for its role in the ongoing decolonization process, but also as an ideal forum for consideration of items of a political nature. Greater use must be made of the Committee's potential with regard to the latter. She therefore supported efforts aimed at the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, including the Main Committees, in particular with regard to the Fourth Committee as expressed in the non-paper approved by the Committee on 11 March 2005 (A/C.4/60/WP.2). Some of the decisions regarding the Committee's working methods, in particular those which did not require the approval of the General Assembly, had already been implemented, although it was too early to know if they had had a positive effect.

62. The Committee's suggestions relating to the allocation of agenda items had not been reflected in General Assembly resolution 59/313, partly because there had not been an opportunity for Member States to discuss the proposed reforms, including proposals from the Main Committees in informal consultations. Her delegation remained convinced that one way to rationalize the work of the General Assembly was to ensure a better allocation of agenda items between the plenary Assembly and the Committees. Revitalization was a continuous process which required the participation of the plenary Assembly as well as the Main Committees. Papers such as the one submitted by the Fourth Committee (A/C.4/60/WP.2) were an integral part of that process. Her delegation was confident that the ad hoc working group open to all Member States to be established in accordance with General Assembly resolution 59/313, would take into account the views of the Main Committees, in particular those which required the approval of the plenary Assembly for implementation.

63. **The Chairman** drew the Committee's attention to two documents issued under agenda item 116: draft provisional guidelines on approximate dates for the consideration of items by the Fourth Committee at the sixty-first session of the General Assembly (A/C.4/60/WP.1) and the non-paper approved by the Committee on 11 March 2005 on revitalization of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) (A/C.4/60/WP.2). The Bureau was of the opinion that those two documents would be useful to the ad hoc working group to be established pursuant to paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 59/313 in its discussion of the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, and in particular with regard to the working methods of the Fourth Committee. It therefore recommended that the two documents should be annexed to the report of the Committee on agenda item 116. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed with that recommendation.

64. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.